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Undertaking a publication-based PhD in Nursing or Midwifery:
A practical guide for students and supervisors

This guidance document was prepared in line with UCC's Procedures for the Submission and Examination of PhD Theses, Section 3: Publication-Based Doctoratus Philosophiae (PhD) Thesis (updated 2024) and in consultation with Students, Supervisors, and Members of the School's Graduate Studies Committee and Executive Committee.

General principles based on UCC policy:

- A typical publication-based PhD thesis should include at least one published paper in a peer-reviewed journal, with others in press, submitted, or planned.
- All papers should fit around the pre-approved PhD topic, with a substantial introduction and discussion to tie the work together.
- Conference presentations are generally not suitable for inclusion as standalone chapters/pieces of work unless conference papers have been peer-reviewed.
- Published PDFs should not be included in the main body of the thesis; instead, text-based manuscript versions (e.g., pre-proofs) should be used. Published PDFs can be included as appendices.
- The PhD student is normally the first author and supervisors/collaborators are co-authors. Individual contributions must be clearly specified. See ICMJE's Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors for guidance.
- All elements of the thesis, including published material, are subject to examination. While publications are a strength, they do not predetermine the outcome of a viva voce.

Nursing and Midwifery disciplinary guidance:

- A publication-based PhD in Nursing or Midwifery should contain multiple studies, including published and unpublished work, with a clear connection to nursing and/or midwifery.
- The thesis should have a clear statement of significance and relevance to the discipline and healthcare, with a focus on impact and outcomes for practice, research, and/or education (as appropriate).
- It is recommended that a publication-based PhD in Nursing or Midwifery includes at a minimum:
    - Background/context chapter inclusive of an introduction to the overall thesis and signposting to various chapters and publications.
    - Literature review chapter, where appropriate.
    - Methodology chapter unless the methodology is discussed in detail in a published paper(s).
    - Discussion chapter including not just a summary of key findings but a higher-level interpretation of the thesis findings and their significance[1]. It will include limitations, recommendations, and conclusions ensuring the latter are relevant to the discipline.
- The final structure of a publication-based PhD thesis must be in line with UCC policy and agreed between the student and supervisors, while maintaining coherence/ a "golden thread" throughout.
- A PhD by publication should be comprehensive, demonstrating progress in thinking and approach. It should have original, novel, and significant impact on the discipline.
- Each chapter should connect to the overall research question, telling a coherent story.
- The thesis should demonstrate the learning achieved over the course of studies and may include scholarly activities (e.g., student awards, recognitions, and so on).

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[1] Lewis et al. (2021) Writing a compelling integrated discussion: a guide for integrated discussions in article-based theses and dissertations. Int. J. Nurs. Educ. Scholarsh. 2021; 18(1): 20200057 https://doi.org/10.1515/ijnes-2020-0057